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SOUTH AFRICA COUNCIL SCORNS APARTHEID ACTS

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa -- The South Africa Council of Churches (SACC) continued to take a leading role in speaking against the excesses of apartheid this month with a warning to the country's top policeman and a strong condemnation of the banning action of the Transkei.

In two recent statements, the Rt. Rev. Desmond Tutu, the Anglican bishop who is general secretary of the Council, scored the Transkei step of banning 34 organizations -- many church related -- as "abhorrent to the world community," and characterized as "arrant nonsense" and "gross untruths" statements made by the government's minister of police and prisons, Louis Le Grange.

Transkei was the first of South Africa's black tribal "homelands" to be proclaimed an independent nation by South Africa. Since its "independence" in 1975, it has failed to receive recognition by any country outside southern Africa.

On Friday, Nov. 2, the Transkei government declared 34 organizations illegal under its Public Security Act. These included the SACC, its Division of Dependents' Conference, the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Students' Christian Movement, and the Young Christian Workers.

"The whole banning exercise on Black Friday," said Bishop Tutu, "would be totally ridiculous were it not for the serious consequences for the people of the Transkei."

Bishop Tutu said the Council was deeply concerned about the effects the banning action would have on "the countless individuals who have been assisted and served by the monies that have come through such bodies as the WCC and the SACC."

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The Council was also gravely concerned that its community development and relief programs "will no longer be allowed to render the human assistance on which so many people (in the Transkei) were dependent," the bishop added.

The bishop was also quick to respond to a recent speech by Le Grange in which that minister had specifically warned the Council to "desist from irresponsible actions and encouraging people to break the law." The minister referred to an "anti-investment campaign" which, he alleged, "was being cautiously propagated."

Responding to these and other charges made by the government official, Bishop Tutu said, "The SACC and the churches reserve the right to condemn if need be any legislation which is abhorrent to the Christian conscience and which represents an abrogation of the rule of law. Certainly detention without trial and the arbitrary banning of people are in this category and we do not apologize for being ever-vigilant in this regard."

According to Bishop Tutu, "the SACC has been critical of the role of foreign investments but has nowhere yet advocated cautiously or otherwise an anti-investment policy."

The bishop has recently called upon foreign companies wishing to remain in South Africa to ensure that their black labor force is housed as family units near the place of work of the breadwinner, and added that black workers should be able to sell their labor in the free market and should be fully unionized. He also appealed to the foreign companies to make substantial investment in black education and training.

The bishop, a native South African, commented that "we are accused of doing something quite evil in trying to alleviate the distress of unemployed people by helping them to produce income through self-help projects. The minister says we are exploiting the unemployment situation. . . . We want to say as respectfully as possible that the minister is talking arrant nonsense and we would hope he would apologize for all these groundless attacks, especially this one."

Bishop Tutu maintained that "the minister is guilty of gross untruths and he knows it when he says we have channeled funds to resistance movements. Why does he not use the wide powers he has to prosecute us if we have done what is obviously so illegal in South Africa?"

In a bleak commentary, the bishop made it clear that he is not sanguine about the Council's status and then added his warning to the racist government:

"We know the tactics of this government. They plan to take action against the SACC and they wish to prepare the public for that action. We want to remind them of a few things. First of all they must stop playing at being God. They are human beings who happen to be carrying out an unjust and oppressive policy with a whole range of draconian laws. But they are still just mere mortals. And we are tired of having threats levelled at us. Why don't they carry them out?"

In addition, Bishop Tutu said, "we want to warn Mr. Le Grange and others who may be tempted to emulate him. The SACC is a council of churches, not a private organization. The church has been in existence for nearly 2,000 years. Tyrants and others have acted against Christians during those years. They have arrested them. They have killed them. They have proscribed the faith. Those tyrants belong now to the flotsam and jetsam of forgotten history -- and the Church of God remains, an agent of justice, of peace, of love and reconciliation.

"If they take on the SACC and the churches, let them just know they are taking on the Church of Jesus Christ."

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